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Fwd: new Dresden bombing study

1 message

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Sat, Mar 20, 2010 at 10:02 AM

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Interesting. Is anybody following this?

Peter

----- Forwarded message -----

F [redacted] n
To: p[redacted]@aol.co [redacted]@sn.com
Date: Fri, 19 Mar 2010 17:11:52 -0400
Subject: new Dresden bombing study

: Dresden Bombing Deaths Exaggerated
Updated: 2 hours 30 minutes ago
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Contributor

(March 19) -- On Feb. 13-15, 1945, British and U.S. bombers pounded the eastern German city of Dresden with 3,900 tons of high explosives and incendiaries. How many people lost their lives in the devastating firestorms that followed has long been a subject of contention -- the Nazis claimed the dead numbered close to 500,000; modern historians have estimated up to 40,000.

Now a five-year study by a panel of German historians has concluded that about 25,000 people died in the attack, far fewer than most experts thought. Researchers pored over records from the city's archives, cemeteries, official registries and courts. They discovered that the death toll among refugees from the Eastern Front was lower than previously reported. They also dismissed the idea that hundreds of thousands of bodies could have lain undiscovered in the smoldering ruins.

Walter Hahn/AFP/Getty Images

How many people died during the bombing of Dresden in early 1945? One new study puts the number at about 25,000. This photo was taken right after the Allied attack.

The study by the Dresden Historian's Commission was launched in 2004 with the aim of ending a bitter debate that has divided Germany for decades. Far-right groups have long cited the 500,000 figure. They called for the attack to be labeled a war crime as it deliberately targeted civilians and was strategically unnecessary, as Germany was just three months away from surrender.

That argument is part of a wider effort by the far right to portray the Nazis and allied forces as morally equivalent. They say that while the Third Reich committed atrocities, such as the murder of Europe's Jews, America and Britain were also guilty of slaughtering innocents.

In contrast, many mainstream historians argue that the once beautiful Baroque city -- known as Florence on the Elbe -- was an important transport hub for Nazi troops heading east, and therefore a legitimate target. The deaths of thousands of civilians in the raid were a terrible tragedy in an otherwise just war.

It's unlikely that this new study will extinguish the still burning controversy. Last month, about 6,400 skinheads attempted to stage a rally of remembrance in Dresden on the attack's 65th anniversary, but they were blocked from marching by 12,000 anti-Nazi campaigners. And just one hour after the historical commission published its report, 150 protesters descended on Dresden's city hall.

"This [report] has not ended the debate at all," said the city's cultural commissioner, Ralf Lunau, according to the London Times.

The inflated death toll was first pushed into the public consciousness by now discredited far-right historian David Irving, who served 13 months in an Austrian jail for holocaust denial in 2005-06. His 1963 tome "The Destruction of Dresden" quoted a Nazi document that said 202,400 people had died and predicted another 250,000 corpses would be found.

American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, a prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the bombing, then used that statistic in his bestselling 1969 book "Slaughterhouse Five." (Irving's far-right leanings were not known at the time Vonnegut used the book as a source.)

But British historian Frederick Taylor noted in his 2004 book "Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945" that those numbers were almost certainly faked by the Third Reich. Reports from local authorities in 1945 recorded about 25,000 casualties, but Taylor says the Nazis added a zero, presumably to persuade the German people that the allies were brutal murderers who must be resisted.
